

Barbara, of Southport, North Carolina, thought they had after John served 21 years in the Army. That service included two tours in Vietnam with the artillery. Sergeant Nation was certified by the Veterans Administration as suffering cancer from exposure to Agent Orange during that war.

Here is the benefit that Sergeant Nation received: because there was not an Army or VA hospital within 2½ hours of their home, they had to seek civilian treatment. Because Barbara had private health insurance through her job at Carolina Power & Light, CHAMPUS refused to accept primary responsibility for John's treatment. When CHAMPUS received the portion of John's bills not covered by the private insurance, they still refused to pay for the vast majority of the care. They told Barbara, his wife, that the charges exceeded their rate schedule, so they were not obligated to pay anything. On bills that were within their rate schedule, CHAMPUS rejected the majority of chemotherapy, radiation, and hospital charges on technical grounds. John passed away. Barbara was forced to surrender her entire retirement savings to pay the bills rejected by CHAMPUS.

Now, I ask every Member of this House, is this fully funded health care for life as promised? Does the treatment that Sergeant First Class John Nation received from the U.S. Government qualify as having provided the benefits that he and his family were promised?

John Nation honored his part of the contract. We failed to honor ours. It is time we made good on our promises to the Nation's military retirees; and I urge each and every one of you to support H.R. 3573, the Keep Our Promises to America's Military Retirees Act. 260 Members have now cosponsored this bill so that we may keep our word. It is important that the Federal Government keep its word. You cannot expect retention to improve in the military; you cannot expect that people are going to stay in as a career, when we will not keep our word to them.

Mr. Speaker, this should be one of our top priorities, because it is the right thing for the United States Government to do for the men and women that risked life and limb to defend this Nation.

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HEATING OIL CRISIS IN NEW YORK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I simply want to bring to the attention of Congress the situation of the people that I represent in Monroe County, New York. Some of them are up there now trying to shovel snow off their roofs. We have the dubious distinction this year of having had more snow than anywhere in the United States, a distinction that we really prefer go to Buffalo or Oswego.

I have an extraordinary number of retired persons as well. In addition to the high cost of prescription drugs, they are now being forced to decide whether they will eat or pay the soaring home heating costs.

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The families have seen the price of home heating oil rise on an hourly basis. There has been no way to understand it, to plan for it, or to budget for it. They are upset, and those who are on low and fixed incomes are having to choose again between everything else that they do and heating their homes, which really is not a choice. With the temperatures that we have had this January and February, we have had over 21 days of straight snow this year. There is no option but not to freeze to death.

We have had numbers of truckers who have called us and told us that the extraordinary high rise in diesel fuel, over \$2 a gallon an increase, has made it impossible for many of them even to continue to run their rigs and they have put them aside until, as Washington says, help is on the way.

I understand what the President said that once this cold snap is over, that we hope that the prices will go down, but in the meantime, I have people who are in severe crisis. I am happy that there is going to be a summit tomorrow on this, but I frankly think that the cautious approach that the White House is taking is too little and too late.

We know that actions will speak louder than words. It is really critical that this year, because this is a debate, as my colleagues have pointed out, that we have year after year, that we do something about it to take care of these permanent needs that the Northeast has for heating assistance. I have joined on to legislation that I hope will do just that this year.

We hate to come every year and talk about how our people again are freezing to death, although I think we are really quite generous in helping when other Members of Congress come to the floor with problems in their district that nature has given to them. But it is really important that we do something about this this time.

Mr. Speaker, I am not sure why the prices have risen. I agree with the gentleman from New York (Mr. CROWLEY) who spoke previously that it needs a good investigation to make sure that at this time when temperatures are low that these costs are not deliberate. It is very important that we look at that.

In the meantime, I would like to urge the President and the Secretary of Energy to really include the action right now of releasing some oil from the strategic petroleum reserve. We must, as I said before, start a home-heating oil reserve in the Northeast so that we can have a long-term solution to this crisis.

One solution may be, as many speakers before me have pointed out, and I

know that the President had brought up one year, is that why should LIHEAP money, which is really used for low-income heating, be sent throughout the 50 States and the territories. Might it not be more important that we send it to places where it is needed, and I would like to have that looked into as well. But action and not delay is needed now.

So, on behalf of all of my constituents today who are out trying to shovel off the roof, to make sure that the pipes are not frozen, keeping the heat in the house as low as they can so that they can afford to eat, I want to say to my colleagues and to everyone in this Congress that Mother Nature waits on no one and that quick action is needed for the people of the Northeast.

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PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFITS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. OSE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 1999, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. ALLEN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, Congress is back in session; and while we are resuming our work, we have to attend first to part of the unfinished business of last year. All across this country, seniors are finding it harder and harder to take their prescription drugs, because they simply cannot afford to take the medication that their doctors tell them they must take. They are not following doctor's orders, simply because they cannot afford their medication. We have looked at this issue over the past year, the Democrats have looked at this issue, and are ready to go again, ready to do some work to relieve the problems that seniors and others are facing all around this country.

We need to do two things. First, we need to stop price discrimination against seniors. Second, we need to provide a universal prescription drug benefit under Medicare.

Let us start with what is going on in the real world. In the real world, many seniors are not filling their prescriptions or, when they do, they are taking one pill out of three. However, all across this country, they are finding they simply cannot afford to take the drugs that their doctors tell them they have to take.

Starting in my district of Maine, the First District of Maine and extending all across this country, the democratic staff of the Committee on Government Reform has done a series of studies. The first of those studies which I released in July of 1998 show this: on average, seniors pay twice as much for their medication as the drug company's best customers. Well, who are the best customers? They are HMOs, big hospitals, and the Federal Government itself buying prescription drugs for Medicaid recipients or for the Veterans' Administration. Twice as much. Seniors pay twice as much as the drug company's best customers.